Telugu AW17

113, 197, 564, 582, 614

[For information pertaining to language regions, kinship terminology and kin relationships, see 5: Karve AW1 India, category 116, pp. 230-1.]

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

living in Shamirpet is the Madiga. The various sections of the Madiga community have their own special functions which are of great significance for the social life and culture of the caste. The Nulka Sandayya are said to be the descendants of Jamavanta,[1] who is believed to be the founder of the entire Madiga caste. The Baindlas are the marriage priests of the Madigas. Of the Sindus, the men are the minstrels of the Madigas and have the function of reciting the sacred caste legends and enacting them in the form of folk-drama; while the women are the prostitutes of the community. The Mashto earn their living by giving acrobatic displays. The Dakkal are the lowest of all Madiga sections and are distinguished by their customary refusal to take food from any non-Madiga. The Brahmin, who is at the apex of the caste-hierarchy, refuses to partake of food at the hands of anyone with a social status lower than his own, in effect from any but his own caste-fellows. And it is a juxtaposition that the lowest of the low castes refuses food from all communities of the higher levels, including the Brahmins.

Each independent endogamous division is divided into exogamous *gotram*; these in turn may be further subdivided into numerous *vansham*. The main function of these divisions is the regulation of marital unions. A person cannot marry in his own *gotram*; he must marry in some other *gotram* bearing a different name. Different *gotram* may have a number of common *vansham*, and as marriage between persons of the same *vansham* is forbidden, one must marry not only outside one's *gotram* but in a different *vansham* also. If a person of one's own *vansham* dies, one must observe ceremonial mourning for ten days. These subdivisions seem to perform no other special function. The enumeration of the various *gotram* and *vansham* is difficult and would only result in long and tedious lists running to forty and fifty names, and will not here be given.

The diagram shown opposite will illustrate the organization of the endogamous sub-castes *gotram* and *vansham* within the wider social unit of caste in the area under study.

In the diagram each sub-caste is endogamous; and as such a person born in unit 1 must marry within that unit, and so also persons in units 2, 3 and 4 must confine their marital relations to their respective units only. But each of these units is divided into a

[1] A conspicuous figure playing a significant role in the epic of *Ramayana*.

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number of exogamous *gotram*, and it is necessary that one must marry outside his own *gotram*. A *gotram* may be further subdivided into a number of *vansham*. In some cases the *vansham* units in the different *gotram* have common names, and this necessitates a further precaution: not only should a man marry in a *gotram* different from his own, but he must also see that he does not marry into his own *vansham* although it belongs to a different *gotram*. Thus, a person belonging to sub-caste 1, *gotram* 'A', *vansham* 'a', must marry within sub-caste 1, but he can choose a spouse from *gotram* B, C and D subject to the condition that he does not marry anyone belonging to *vansham* 'a' and chooses the spouse from *vansham* b, c or, for that matter, a *vansham* having any other name.

Gotram, for all practical purposes, are like exogamous clans. Each *gotram* bears a distinctive name, which is either derived from

CASTE

1				2				3				4			
A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd	abcd

1, 2, 3, 4 . . Sub castes
A, B, C, D . . . *Gotram*
a, b, c, d . . . *Vansham*

a sage of ancient India or is totemic in nature. The term *vansham* is derived from Sanskrit and means a lineage. Sociologically, in the context of patrilineal societies, if we define a lineage as 'an association of people of both sexes comprising all the recognized descendants by an accepted genealogy of a single named ancestor in a putatively continuous male line',[1] we can regard *vansham* as a lineage. Each *vansham* bears an individual name which is either derived from or is in some way associated with the common mythological ancestor of the sub-group. At the death of a person belonging to one's own *vansham* formal observance of ritual impurity and ceremonial purification are necessary even when one has no kinship or afinal ties with the deceased. A girl belonging to one's own *vansham* is a sister, a boy a brother, and that is why

[1] Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (London, 1945), p. 30.

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sexual union of any type between the two is regarded as a kind of incest. It has already been pointed out that these units have no functions beyond those mentioned above and have no common organization, authority or ceremonial distinctively belonging to them.

Although in general we can regard Shamirpet as fairly representative of Telangana villages, some Telugu-speaking castes which play an important part in rural Telangana are not to be found in the village; and it will be perhaps advantageous to make a passing reference to some of these castes here. The Velma are a rich agricultural caste more or less equal in status to the Reddis. The Kamma are another caste of the Kapu group who inter-dine with the Reddi, but they are regarded as equals of the lower clean caste groups. The Balja traders are Shaivite Hindus whose status is regarded as being a little higher than that of the Komti. The Gandla works the oil press, and his status is similar to that of the Sale and the Gaondla. The Yenadi, who in some parts of Telangana act as village guards, are in status equal to the Erkala. The Lambada provide a colourful though somewhat alien element in the population of Telangana. In language, dress and ornament they stand out from the rest of the people of Telangana. Their northern origin is clear both from their physical appearance and from their language. The dress of the Lambada woman is picturesque. Her multi-coloured skirt (*lahanga*), tight bodice (*choli*) and upper covering (*odhni*) are elaborately embroidered and worked with appliqued mirror. Her ornaments are heavy and distinctive, and their tinkling sound lends an air of romance to the dusty roads of the countryside. There is a Lambada settlement some six miles from Shamirpet and they are a common sight on the nearby road.

Mention should also be made of three wandering caste groups—the Balsantanam, the Sharda-galu and the Dasari. The Balsantanam live in small, low, portable huts and move from village to village. They weave mats, sing songs and legends, and beg from village cultivators. The Sharda-galu are professional story-tellers and earn their livelihood by reciting the legends of their vast repertoire. Similarly, the Dasari are country dramatists who contribute towards the entertainment of the villagers by performing folk plays. Members of many of the castes mentioned above make occasional appearances in Shamirpet.